

VZCZCXRO3918
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #0554/01 0450852
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 140852Z FEB 10 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5583
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000554

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
USFOR-A FOR POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: OPERATION MOSHTARAK - SITUATIONAL UPDATE FOR FEBRUARY 13, 2010

REF: (A) KABUL 543, (B) KABUL466, (C) KABUL 115, (D) 09 KABUL 4187

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Following the blessing by President Karzai on the evening of 12 February, the operations in Nad Ali (Operation Moshtarak) started at 0200 on the morning of 13 February. Most of the day's activity took place in the northern half of the district, and although not yet secure, Marjah is quiet. Afghan officials have shown active leadership throughout the planning and execution of all political and military aspects of this operation. Helmand Governor Mangal and many other provincial and district officials have been extremely upbeat about the operations, and they look forward to the ministerial visits and shuras that are scheduled to take place over the coming days to further bolster good governance in Nad Ali district. Following a security assessment by PRT Helmand security staff, the civilian-led District Support Team (DST) for Nad Ali/Marjah -- which includes both U.S. and U.K. civilian development and stabilization personnel -- plans to move into the operational areas within the coming days. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) This is a situational update for Operation Moshtarak from PRT Lashkar Gah.

Political Update

Provincial:

¶3. (SBU) As of late February 13, across the province, Afghan officials, including the Governor and Haji Zahir (the Deputy District Governor for Nad Ali covering Marjah), were extremely positive about Operation Moshtarak, with many believing that the fighting is over. Local reports indicate various neighborhoods throughout Marjah are celebrating in the streets over the positive outcome thus far, including no major reports of civilian casualties. In Showal, in northern Nad Ali, a shura was held for the first time, with plans for a second in the near future.

¶4. (SBU) On February 13, Regional Command - South (RC-S) Senior Civilian Representative Frank Ruggiero and RC-S Commander Major General Nick Carter (UK) met with Governor Mangal to discuss the opening of the operations prior to the Governor's press conference. MG Carter reported that the insertion was successful, with no battle casualties or resistance from enemy forces. He continued that all the troops, both ISAF and ANSF, understood their rules of engagement as requested by President Karzai. Mangal said that he had heard from Minister Jelani Popal, Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), who was satisfied with the current level of consultation going into this operation.

¶5. (SBU) Both civilian and military personnel at the Regimental Combat Team (RCT) at Camp Dwyer briefed Zahir on the events for the next few days, and he told the RCT that he was thoroughly impressed

with the significant level of detail that has gone into the planning, particularly for his initial visit to the affected area and the upcoming VIP visits over the next few days.

National:

¶6. (SBU) Governor Mangal, who has exhibited strong leadership throughout this operation, is fully prepared to receive the ministerial delegation from Kabul, which is currently expected to include Interior Minister Atmar and Defense Minister Wardak, for a high level shura on February 14-16. Ministers will conduct a series of meetings in and around the operational area and will possibly participate in the District Development Plan (DDP) rollout for Nad Ali planned for 16 February.

Media

¶7. (SBU) Governor Mangal had a successful press conference the morning of 13 February, which was picked up by international media outlets. Additionally, he did interviews with Sky News, the BBC, and CNN. Initial news reports following the insertion were very positive, reflecting the degree of cooperation between the Afghans and the international community, and the lack of casualties suffered by civilians, ANSF and coalition forces. The New York Times characterized the offensive as a "new war model" in its plan to immediately insert Afghan governance and police following clearing operations.

Forward Deployment of DST

¶8. (SBU) USAID and DOS personnel are pre-positioned with the Marine Command and will deploy into Marjah when the Marines deem it safe. In addition, a UK Civilian Security Assessment Team will deploy

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shortly in order to facilitate deployment of UK personnel into Marjah. Together, these U.S., UK and Marine units will form the District Support Team (DST). The DST is already planning a flag-raising ceremony and immediate support for Deputy District Governor Haji Zahir.

Development

¶8. (SBU) Civil Service Training - On 12 February, the Helmand Civil Service Institute opened in Lashkar Gah and started its first session of training for existing and soon-to-be civil servants for Helmand province. This was a joint DFID/USAID effort in that DFID was responsible for providing the equipment and refurbishment of the building while USAID provided the trainers and curriculum. As the PRT looks to assist the Nad Ali district government with the establishment of effective governance in Marjah, this training falls in line with the multi-national development plan for Operation Moshtarak.

¶9. (SBU) DDP Rollout for Nad Ali - As it stands now, Governor Mangal has agreed on the District Delivery Program Rollout for Nad Ali District to take place on 16 February. We understand from our British colleagues that this is a strategic communications event to highlight the agreed plan to deploy Afghan governance to Marjah (and improve it elsewhere in the rest of Nad Ali district) in the coming weeks and months. The Governor will also host a Budget Conference, during which participants plan to discuss and finalize the hard numbers necessary for the full DDP rollout. (Note: USAID and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) are preparing a joint cable to fully explain the PRT thoughts on the DDP process. End note.)

Reintegration

¶10. (SBU) The PRT has received reports that low-level fighters are seeking to reintegrate, and this reintegration will likely be informally done and take place at the local level. The PRT will

continue to track this situation with Task Forces Leatherneck and Helmand and our civilian personnel at the RCT. Zahir and RCT personnel discussed at length the plans and way forward across major and minor level "reintegreees," but with the new military order (FRAGO) from RC-S in place which directs that reintegreees be transported to Lashkar Gah for review, RCT personnel will need to review the current reintegration plan. A VTC is scheduled for 14 February to discuss where the process stands following review of the FRAGO. The key question for discussion is what the process will be for detainees who claim that they want to reintegrate, especially those who are mid-level insurgents.

Internally Displaced Persons

¶11. (SBU) According to the Helmand Department of Refugees, 866 families have registered in Lashkar Gah at this point, with roughly 100 additional families being registered each day. However, only 35 families at this point have actually declared that they need assistance and are not staying with family or friends, as the other registrants are doing. (Note: Families must be registered with the Department of Refugees and verified by the UN as being from Marjah in order to qualify for the immediate emergency assistance. Once determined to be from Marjah, ration cards are given to each family in order to obtain tents, plastic sheets, food stuffs and other supplies. End note.)

¶12. (SBU) Reports have surfaced that there are families escaping the fighting and moving to the desert, with no supplies, but the numbers cannot be verified. The Nad Ali shura in advance of the operation strongly discouraged this kind of movement and continues to encourage people to stay within the district. USAID and DFID remain engaged with UNAMA and local Afghan leadership to continue monitoring this situation closely.

¶13. (U) This cable was drafted by the U.S. civilian personnel based in Helmand.